

Magnitude 6.8 quake hits Ecuador, second big shake of day

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Quito: Two powerful earthquakes jolted Ecuador on Wednesday, a magnitude 6.7 early morning temblor followed by a 6.8 shake near midday.

The extent of damage from the second quake was not immediately clear, though President Rafael Correa announced on Twitter some areas along the coast had lost power and said schools would be cancelled nationwide as a precaution. The first caused little serious damage. Both appeared to be aftershocks of a magnitude 7.8 quake a month earlier.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the second quake hit at 11:46 a.m. (12:46 p.m. EDT; 1646 GMT) and was centered along the coast below land about 15 miles (24 kilometers) north of the city of Rosa Zarate.

The earlier quake was centered less than 10 miles (about 10 kilometers) away and struck shortly before 3 a.m. local time. Both are less than 100 miles (155 kilometers) west-northwest of the capital, Quito.

“These sort of aftershocks are normal but that doesn’t mean they’re not scary and can cause damage,” Correa said in a televised address after the early morning shake. He added that aftershocks of this magnitude were normal for up to two months after a major quake like the one Ecuador experienced.

The president said that while some previously ravaged homes suffered more damage, most had already been evacuated and no buildings had collapsed. There were no reports of fatalities, he said.

Security coordination minister Cesar Navas said one person was injured when a wall fell and five others were hurt in panicky efforts to flee buildings.

The magnitude 7.8 earthquake on April 16 was Ecuador’s worst natural disaster in decades, killing 661 and leaving more than 28,000 people homeless. It has been followed by hundreds of aftershocks, at least five of them of magnitude 6.0 or higher.

Ecuador was already struggling economically before the April disaster. Correa has hiked taxes to fund the recovery but says it will take years to rebuild the beach towns and tourist hubs leveled by the quake.

Jorge Zambrano, mayor of Manta, one of the areas hit hardest by last month’s big quake, said streets were calm. “It was a big shake and all of us were scared but there are no major problems at the moment,” said Zambrano.

- AP